

# How Alaskan Organizations Are Supporting Youth

Throughout Alaska, businesses and organizations of all types are using Asset Building to connect youth and adults. These are examples of what some Alaskan organizations are doing to help kids succeed.

The **Alaska Native Knowledge Network** has published "Guidelines for Nurturing Culturally Healthy Youth" and other materials that illustrate asset-building principles.

**Alaska Native Medical Center** pediatrician **Dr. Dick Mandsager** (and other physicians throughout the state) writes parent instructions on notepads that give tips on Asset Building.

**Amazing Grace Lutheran Church** delivers a five-minute assets message at the end of its Sunday services. The message includes tips on how family members and others can be asset builders. Also the youth group hosts asset-building, intergenerational activities throughout the year.

The **Anchorage School District Safe and Drug Free Schools** program educates teachers, bus drivers, counselors, administrators, and community members about assets. They also use the Asset Framework to help decide which projects to fund through their mini-grant program.

**Bethel's** early childhood education and care advocates collaborated with groups in the community to produce and publish a calendar with ideas for Asset Building.

**Camp Fire USA, Alaska Council** integrates assets into its services through extensive staff training and incorporating asset-building activities into its summer and before- and after-school programs.

**Cook Inlet Tribal Council**, through a partnership with the Anchorage School District, is placing teachers, counselors, family advocates and assistant teachers in eight middle and senior high schools. The Asset Framework will be incorporated through staff training and outreach to Native parents to assure culturally responsive instruction and increase academic success. Approximately 800-1000 Alaska Native students will be served through this collaboration.

**Elmendorf Air Force Base 3rd Wing Legal Office** encourages participation in school activities and organizations. Employees are allowed time off and encouraged to volunteer with Junior Achievement and other programs in their child's elementary school.

At **Fairbanks Billing Service** employees may adjust schedules to accommodate family needs and are paid time off for teacher conferences. The company hosts an employee summer picnic, complete with kids' activities.

**Frigid North**, an electronics company, briefs all new employees on the Asset Framework, hands out asset resources and talks about ways to help kids in safety meetings. The company helped underwrite the printing of the assets book and donated copies to several local organizations.

**Haines Library**, through its **Dragonfly Project**, builds assets by using teenagers to teach older



For a copy of this poster, visit our website: [www.alaskaice.org](http://www.alaskaice.org)

community members how to use computers and other technology resources.

**Head Start** programs throughout Alaska began working on resiliency and protective factors in the early 1990s. This work provided the foundation for the widespread use of the assets approach with young children all over the state.

The **Igiugig Tribal Council** sponsors many family fun and community service projects. They publish a family activity bingo game, available to all residents. The program coordinator uses the asset approach to guide many program decisions.

The **Juneau Public Library** promotes adult-teen-child reading together. They provided cameras to library patrons and invited them to submit photos of kids and "elders" reading together all over town. They created a poster from the photos and displayed it at the library.

The **Kake Peace Making Circle** brings together people in the community who are affected by a wrongful act. Collectively, with the offender, they work to change the conditions that lead to the offense. The focus is on mending relationships and creating stronger support systems. The Circles are used successfully by youth to address

alcohol, drug, and bullying problems as well.

**Ketchikan's PATCHWorks** (Planned Approach to Community Health) adopted the assets approach as their community initiative in the mid-1990s. Today nearly everyone in the community knows about assets and they continually look for ways to support and empower young people.

**Kids Are People** in the Matanuska Valley sponsors an annual Family Fun Day, to encourage families to have fun together. They also share the asset message with families they work with throughout the year. In addition, KAP sponsors a variety of local and statewide peer-education programs.

**KMBQ** in Wasilla hosts a weekly "Teen Power Hour," where teens share their opinions about local issues. The **Mat-Su Valley Credit Union** sponsors a daily "Mat-Su Middle Ground" program on KMBQ in which middle school students tell listeners what's going on in local schools each week.

Juneau's **Northern Lights United Church** has incorporated the Asset Framework in almost every aspect of its ministry. To establish and maintain closer youth-adult relationships, the

Church has sponsored a variety of activities including, mentor matchmaker teams, Wednesday night dinners, service projects, youth exchange teams to other churches and monthly FUN Nights.

**Public health nurses** talk to parents about assets during well child exams by using an "assets prescription card" and displaying information about the asset framework in the patient waiting and exam rooms.

**Ron Larson Elementary School** in Wasilla creates many asset-building opportunities for young students and their families, and acknowledges the importance of many adults in the school community. All school bus drivers receive a complimentary copy of *Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style* along with other kudos on Bus Driver Recognition Day.

The **Seven Circles Coalition** provides funds to five southeast communities to organize prevention-focused youth-adult partnerships.

The **Spirit of Youth** organization works with media outlets statewide to broadcast stories about teenagers contributing to their communities in unique and inspiring ways. Through additional partnerships with local

governing bodies it provides further public recognition for youth service activities.

The **State of Alaska's Adolescent Health Program** has incorporated the Asset Framework statewide through its state plan, grants, survey and evaluation instruments, training and technical assistance functions. The state's **Suicide Prevention Program** uses the asset approach in its training of community-based suicide prevention coordinators. Coordinators throughout the state develop ways to strengthen relationships and create opportunities for children and youth in their communities.

**Tikigaq Corporation**, in the village of Point Hope, gives parental leave and flexible work hours for employees to spend time in their children's school. They expect each employee in Pt. Hope to spend 30 minutes weekly mentoring and tutoring children in the local school.

**Tlingit/Haida Head Start** has had several asset workshop over the years. They produced a set of two powerful videos, *"Family Feathers"* and *"Parents' Journal,"* that feature culturally relevant strength-based parenting strategies.

**United Way of Anchorage** has hired an asset trainer to be available to local family and youth-

serving agencies. The **Anchorage Youth Development Coalition** has incorporated a strength-based assets approach in its mission and work across agencies and with youth.

**Valley Hospital** in Palmer gives out copies of *Helping Kids Succeed – Alaskan Style* to all parents of newborns born in the hospital.

To build relationships between kids and adults in the neighborhood the Schleich family created a **Virtues Club**. Local families come together monthly to learn and practice virtues or values like compassion, respect, honesty and creativity. Afterwards a simple craft, game, or other activity (adults and kids together) is played to reinforce the virtues and growing friendships.

**Youth Courts** across Alaska reinforce the assets model through their leadership skills training and philosophy of giving teens the responsibility for holding their peers accountable for their actions. **Anchorage Youth Court** goes an additional step by training youth court attorneys and judges in the Asset Framework, so they can incorporate asset-building ideas into the sentencing of children aged 9-11 in its Pre-Court program.



# Helping Kids Succeed - ALASKAN STYLE

## LEADERS OF ALASKA'S ASSET BUILDING INITIATIVE

### Local Initiatives

Assets for Interior Alaska Youth, Fairbanks  
Anchorage School District Safe & Drug Free Schools  
United Way of Anchorage

### Statewide Initiative

Association of Alaska School Boards  
Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Alaska Faith Communities Concerned for Children  
Spirit of Youth  
Resiliency in Residence Life

## Principles of Asset Building

- IT'S ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS.
- ALL CHILDREN NEED ASSETS.
- INFANCY-ADULTHOOD: THE PROCESS IS ONGOING.
- NO SINGLE ASSET IS THE ANSWER.
- EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY.
- SMALL THINGS COUNT.

## Asset Building Presentations

Alaska ICE is known for inspiring and experiential learning sessions that introduce the Asset Framework within a community context. Community Engagement presentations are designed to create connection and build support networks between youth and adults in fun and meaningful ways.

To schedule a presentation or learn more about the services we offer, contact Alaska ICE:

alaskaice@aasb.org (907) 586-1486

Learn more. Get involved.  
Visit the Alaska ICE Website:  
[www.alaskaice.org](http://www.alaskaice.org)  
Tell us what's happening in your community!

NEW



**Helping Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style**  
The Original - 125,000 in circulation



**Helping Little Kids Succeed - Alaskan Style**  
New Companion Volume - Children 0 to 6 years

**Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement**  
A statewide initiative of the Association of Alaska School Boards  
"Working to create healthy relationships, improve academic success and increase well-being among Alaska's children and youth."

## Top Ten Tips Teens Want Parents to Know

Following a series of asset presentations and discussions, Chugiak's HIGH SCHOOL POSITIVE VALUES ADVOCATES created this action list for parents to help their children become successful.

- 1 Listen to our stories and try to understand.
- 2 Spend more quality time with us to develop a closer relationship.
- 3 Provide some personal space along with boundaries.
- 4 Make an effort to know and care about our friends.
- 5 Hold family meetings.
- 6 Get to know us as individuals.
- 7 Discuss family issues and personal matters in private.
- 8 Stay calm when discussing issues of disagreement.
- 9 Remember the importance of quality time with family while caring for those members with unique needs.
- 10 Consider the needs of all family members, especially during times of changing dynamics.

Get your copy at the Alaska ICE website. Also Available: Posters, activities, news, information stories, photos, resources, events, clothing and more!

# Helping Kids Succeed - ALASKAN STYLE

## CELEBRATING ALASKA ASSET BUILDERS

Assets are the key building blocks in a young person's life that help them grow to be strong, caring and capable. The more assets children have, the more likely they are to be helpful, healthy and productive and do well in school. The more assets youth have the less likely they are to be living troubled lives. External assets are the outside supports needed in every child's life, created and preserved by family, friends and community members. Internal assets are the inner strengths that grow within a child and nurtured by many different people in a young person's life.

The Alaska Initiative for Community Engagement (Alaska ICE) is helping Alaskans create a personal web of support for every young person. Whether it's a family, a clan, a tribe, a village, or a community, every child and teen needs connections with supportive adults. The Alaskans profiled here are your friends and neighbors. They are a few of the countless people across the state using Assets to support our youth in leading healthier and more successful lives. We hope these stories will inspire others to begin *Helping Kids Succeed, Alaskan Style*.



### Darrell Vincek, Anchorage

If Darrell Vincek, Principal of Bowman Elementary in Anchorage, knows the name of your kids, it's not because they've been in trouble. It's because Darrell has embraced a philosophy that encourages the school staff, parents and community to work together to build positive assets in youth.

Among countless other creative projects undertaken by the school, Darrell instituted a program called Silent Mentoring. Every year, the name of each student is written on a board, and the entire school staff puts stickers next to the names of kids with whom they already have significant relationships. Each person then has a goal of choosing a handful of kids they don't know well, kids who might not have as many stickers, and making an effort to identify with these kids, even if it's checking up on them and asking how they're doing once a week.

"It's not hard to build assets in kids," said Darrell. "It's not a program, it's a philosophy. Asset Building celebrates and reinforces what we already do, and it acts as a beacon for us to follow."



### Nancy Seamount, Juneau

Nancy Seamount uses common-sense solutions to solve complicated social problems. According to Nancy, if you want to reduce school violence, drug and alcohol use and teen pregnancy, the most effective thing you can do is create opportunities for kids to feel like critical members of the community.

"By separating teenagers from adults, we decrease the potential of young people," said Nancy. "We're delaying their involvement in authentic life roles for which they are ready."

As a teacher at the Juneau Douglas High School, Nancy has incorporated this philosophy into the curriculum of the school through a program called Students for Social Responsibility and Mediation (SSRM). Through the programs, teens learn about social issues and are paired with community organizations to work on projects that address real community needs.



### Natalie Beach, Wasilla

When Natalie Beach, a senior at Colony High in Wasilla, found out that the kids at the nearby Larson Elementary school needed reading tutors, she stepped up and volunteered. And although her assistance was invaluable to the school, Natalie says that her work over the last three years has also been an invaluable experience for her.

Working one-on-one or in small groups with the children, Natalie was able to build strong relationships with many of her students, and she had the opportunity to see both their reading skills and confidence grow.

"I could see the children I work with were struggling, and my heart went out to them," said Natalie. "Then three months later you could see they had made progress, and you could see how happy they were."

Natalie's attitude about child advocacy and community involvement sets a strong example for everyone who knows her.

"I've made a choice to be a leader and go out and help people. That's what making a better community is about."



### Joe Parrish, Juneau

Joe Parrish believes that building and maintaining trails builds character in youth. During the '70s, Joe worked for a forest service program that created opportunities for young adults to work in the wilderness. When the federal program lost funding in the '80s, Joe started his own nonprofit version in Southeast Alaska. Seventeen years later, the Southeast Alaska Guidance Association has blossomed into a multi-faceted program that employs youth from all areas of the state.

"SAGA is the result of my belief in the power of these programs," said Joe. "It provides kids with a healthy environment, supportive role models, and involves them in work that they can be proud of."

"When I was in my twenties, by working in these programs I was able to work on my own issues," said Joe. "I've seen the effect this had on me, and am sincerely and genuinely engaged and committed to making sure these types of opportunities remain an option for young people. I'm a healthier person, and I hope I'm returning the favor."



### Rich Owens, Anchorage

The Jewel Lake Tastee Freez is a testament to Rich Owens's commitment to youth. The restaurant is most often packed with kids, both behind and in front of the counter. And the walls are covered with certificates of appreciation, photos of sports teams Rich sponsored, and plaques commemorating his work as an official business partner with six Anchorage schools.

Rich sees the relationships between schools and businesses as an integral part of community. He states: "If you own a business, you have a responsibility to be involved in that community."

And there are endless ways in which Rich is involved in the community and in kids' lives. Currently, he employs approximately 125 teenagers at the Tastee Freez and the newly-opened Anchorage water park.

According to Rich, these first-time jobs are invaluable learning experiences for kids. Also, it allows them to interact with adults outside of school and home who can help them through difficult times.

"Over the years, I've been with kids through some tough situations," Rich said. "As an employer you can't be blind to what's happening in the rest of their lives. You have to remain open to them as a friend. Let them know you support them."



### Mike and Gigi Danner, Barrow

Seven years ago, Mike and Gigi Danner built a home that defines the term "dream house." They built a house with seven bedrooms and filled it with kids who needed homes.

The Danners have always had a house full of kids. At first it was their children's friends, and then people from the community who were having a hard time started to turn to the Danners for support. Eventually, this led them to start an official foster home.

"Seven years ago, I didn't think I was ever the type of person who could be patient enough or had enough love for other people's kids, but it happened," said Gigi. "The changes you see in kids are the rewards for the work you've done."

According to the Danners these changes come by showing the kids unconditional love. Mike states: "It's not easy, sometimes it's very difficult, but it's needed. I wish more people would get involved. Look around the community and see how many kids out there need someone they can count on."



### Cody Schwegel, Craig

Sixteen-year-old Cody Schwegel of Craig spends his free time inspiring and empowering youth to find their niche in the community. When his childhood friends started experimenting with smoking and drinking, Cody found the strength to resist the pressure to join them. Instead he focused his talents and energy toward various community projects, and now he's determined to create similar positive opportunities for his peers.

According to Cody, trouble starts when kids lack motivation and things to do—a complaint that he says he hears all too often. Cody responded to this complaint by creating the Youth/Adult Partnership Program, which trains young people how to be effective members of community boards and committees. Teens who participate in this program learn about public process, they run for election to the board, and are able to voice their ideas and concerns regarding community issues. Then it's up to them to get involved.

Cody believes that involvement in community organizations will connect his peers to strong adult role models, let them know of their importance in the community, and show them positive ways to use their time and talents.

### Carole & Roger Huntington, Galena

Carole and Roger Huntington's motto is: "If you want to complain about something, you better be willing to get out there and do something about it." So they sold their successful business and turned the focus of their lives toward teaching communication skills to children and parents.

About one hundred miles outside Galena, the Huntingtons started a summer camp for kids that focuses on building the self-esteem of both the high school and college-age counselors and the young campers. And during the rest of the year, they travel throughout rural Alaska and teach classes in abstinence, relationships and conflict management at public schools.

As a couple, the Huntingtons have made a difference in the lives of rural Alaskans and the children in their community. However, their hope is that their work will encourage other couples to become involved.

"We're so encouraged when we see young couples, young men becoming involved in their communities and their families," Carole said. "We see so much hope in that."



### Janell Privett, Wrangell

As Chair of the Wrangell School Board, Janell Privett keeps the board's focus on youth by encouraging youth to voice their opinions to the board. She states: "I can't imagine not involving kids in our decision-making process. It's so important because they know what they need, and they're very genuine when expressing those needs."

Janell is a strong advocate for youth involvement in all levels of decision making. "I've watched these kids walk into the legislature and lobby right along with the adults. It's empowering for them because they see that they can make a difference."

Ultimately, she hopes that these experiences will instill a sense of social responsibility and encourage them to remain involved as adults.

"Building assets in kids guarantees that when we spend time with kids, they'll spend time with their communities," Janell says. "My greatest experience has been empowering students to expand as adults and make decisions as adults, and showing them that they can do what they set their minds to do."



### Eric Gebhart, Kake

Superintendent, principal, pastor, substitute bus driver—these are just some of the hats worn by Eric Gebhart. Each role is essential in the community, but Eric won't hesitate in pointing toward one job as being the most important—building positive assets in youth and encouraging the rest of the community to do the same.

According to Eric, he's able to build positive assets in youth in all of his roles because any interaction with youth is an opportunity to build a relationship. As he says, "Building assets in youth is just about building relationships."

Through Eric's work, he hopes to encourage others to focus on children in all aspects of their lives. He states, "I can talk about building assets all I want to, but if I don't do it myself it's defeating. We've got to break the program mold and make it a lifestyle thing."



### Erin Steinkruger, Anchorage

Seventeen-year-old Erin Steinkruger, a senior at Steller High School, enjoys being a role model for younger children. When she heard about the Big Brothers Big Sisters high school mentoring program, she knew she wanted to be involved. So, for the last two years she's spent time with her little sister, Brandy, and encourages other kids in her high school to become mentors.

"It's really just a lot of fun," said Erin. "We play on the playground, do projects together and talk about things she's thinking about."

Erin feels it's important for older kids to be strong role models. She states: "There are just so many kids who don't have a good example, and that's something they need. One hour a week is a really small commitment for something so important. The rewards are huge because you're building character in the people who are going to help you retire, who are going to save the planet. They just need you to support them while they grow."



### Robert Tokianna, Brevig Mission

Twenty-year-old Robert Tokianna saves lives in Brevig Mission by teaching something he loves—Eskimo dancing. As the Suicide Prevention Coordinator for the Brevig Mission Traditional Council, Robert has found that the best way to lift the spirits of Alaska's youth is to share the cultural and artistic outlet that has lifted his own spirit.

When Robert began to teach dance, he didn't foresee the far-reaching positive impacts it would have on Brevig Mission's youth. "I thought I was doing Eskimo dancing because I like doing it," said Robert. "I didn't realize I was doing a prevention activity." Soon he saw the joy the youth experience while dancing spills over into all aspects of their lives.

"With lifting up your spirit, they'll have more positive thoughts," said Robert. "They won't think of suicide as much. If they don't think of suicide, the suicide rate will go down. Eskimo dancing is prevention."



### Mike & Linda Setterberg, Fairbanks

With kids of their own, Mike and Linda Setterberg saw that Fairbanks needed a safe, supportive and consistent place where kids could hang out. So in April of 1999, with help from the community, they started Joel's Place. Kids come to Joel's to get help with their homework, play pool, have concerts, eat or just be with their friends.

"We wanted a place where kids could come to build relationships and get support," said Linda. "We provide them with a safety net while they're trying to find out who they are."

For four years Joel's Place has been run by volunteers with help from community churches, businesses and individuals. Approximately 100 kids frequent Joel's and its popularity has led to an upcoming expansion. With community support, Joel's has purchased land for a new building and has developed plans for a skate park.

According to Linda, kids come to Joel's because it's a fun place to be and because they know that the people at Joel's genuinely care about them and their needs—whether they need a person to talk to, a snack to eat after school, or a ramp to fly down on their skateboard.



### Carol Comeau, Anchorage

Carol Comeau is a dedicated and dynamic advocate for what kids need, not just in education but on all levels. As superintendent of the Anchorage School District, Carol uses her forum to keep kids' issues at the forefront of everyone's mind.

Since taking office in 2000, Carol has worked tirelessly to break down the barriers between the school district and the community that interfere with building relationships with kids and opportunities that exist outside of the academic world.

To foster community involvement, she reaches beyond her parent base to citizens who don't have children, businesses, and public organizations and creates opportunities for them to become involved with students. At the same time she encourages her students to build relationships within the community, and become advocates for their own needs.

Carol's commitment inspires and challenges everyone around her to support Alaska's children. She works long hours, and you can find her in her office almost every day of the week.

But whenever she gets a chance, she finds a way to work directly with kids. Carol will tell you her best days are the days she spends with kids.

### John Pingayak II, Chevak

John Pingayak wants his students to know who they are and where they came from. When he began teaching in 1976, he was struck by the absence of cultural activities offered in schools, so he made it his priority to incorporate cultural teachings in the academic realm.

According to John, the best way for students to understand the lives of their ancestors is to take them outside of the classroom into the environment that has shaped their heritage. During Sea Week, John and the village elders connect the lessons the children learn in school to the traditional knowledge of their ancestors.

"When the students go out there, they have first-hand experience of how their ancestors lived. There's a connection that's real, not just a concept," says John.

John believes that this continuation of traditional knowledge is essential to the survival of their culture and communities. He states: "This knowledge promotes high levels of self-esteem and a sense of belonging. Our villages aren't mapped in the world. We don't even exist in the world. But when we do small things like what we do here in Chevak, it makes a big difference for our children."